

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

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INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA IMMEDIATE

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AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 1283

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, MORG, HO

SUBJECT: CURRENT MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1245

1. SITUATION REGARDING CHANGES WITHIN THE HONDURAN MILITARY DESCRIBED REFTEL CONTINUES BUT AT SLOWER PACE. MORNING NEWSPAPERS OF APRIL 3 LISTED CHANGES AND NEWS STORIES ARE GENERALLY ACCURATE. JUAN VASQUEZ, AN OFFICIAL OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE OF THE GOH, HAS BROADCAST COVERAGE OF MOST CHANGES ON HRN, THE NATIONAL RADIO NET.

2. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ITEM OUT SINCE REFTEL CONCERNS INTERVIEWS WITH LT. COL. MARIO MALDONADO (DIRECTOR OF THREE MORNING NEWSPAPERS OF APRIL 3. MALDONADO WAS REACHED BY JOURNALISTS AS HE WAS LEAVING A MEETING OF THE GOH BANANA COMMISSION APRIL 2. ACCORDING TO LA PRENSA, MALDONADO STATED THAT GENERAL LOPEZ HAS NOT

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BEEN DEPRIVED OF MILITARY POWER BECAUSE IN PRINCIPLE

THE HIERARCHY OF THE ARMED FORCES HAS BEEN MAINTAINED AND HE PRESIDES OVER A LOYAL ORGANIZATION WHICH HE CONTROLS THROUGH NORMAL CHANNELS. HE ADDED THAT THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP HAS THOUGHT ONLY OF THE RESOLUTION OF THE COUNTRY'S PROBLEMS WITHOUT FORMING THEMSELVES INTO AN IDEOLOGICAL MOLD FOREIGN TO HONDURAN IDEAS. HE DENIED THAT THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAS BEEN INVOLVING ITSELF IN POLITICAL QUESTIONS AND REAFFIRMED THAT THE COUNCIL HAS JUST BEEN ANALYZING MILITARY MATERS. LA PRENSA'S INTERVIEW CONCLUDES BY QUOTING MALDONADO AS SAYING THAT THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE ARMED FORCES REINFORCES THE GOH'S AGRARIAN REFORM POLICY AND THAT "GENERAL LOPEZ ARELLANO CONTINUES BEING THE LEADER WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES."

3. IN COMMENTS DERIVING FROM THE SAME INTERVIEW, EL CRONISTA CONFIRMED MALDONADO'S STATEMENTS ABOUT THE STATUS OF LOPEZ AND ADDITIONALLY SAID THAT THE CHANGES INITIATED BY THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT (I.E., DEVELOPMENT AND AGRARIAN POLICY) WILL BE FORTIFIED. MALDONADO IS QUOTED AS HAVING SAID "GREATER CHANGES IN THE HONDURAN SOCIETY WILL COME IN FAVOR OF THE GREAT MAJORITIES UP TO NOW FORGOTTEN IN THE ACTION OF THE GOVERNMENT AND BY THE SOCIETY." WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE RUMORS CONCERNING THE POSSIBILITIES OF A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT, MALDONADO SAID THAT THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP HAS THOUGHT ONLY IN MILITARY TERMS AND HAS NOT GIVEN A THOUGHT TO ELECTIONS. EL CRONISTA'S FINAL QUESTION WAS, "DOES MELGAR BELONG TO THE GROUP OF YOUNG COLONELS?" MALDONADO'S PRINTED ANSWER WAS, "WELL, HE IS ALIGNED."

4. MOST OF THE COUNTRY'S NEWSPAPERS ARE APPARENTLY AWAITING FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS BEFORE MAKING SUBSTANTIVE EDITORIAL JUDGMENT. TIEMPO'S LEAD EDITORIAL OF APRIL 3 CONCERNS THE STANDARD FRUIT COMPANY AND ONLY LA PRENSA DEALT WITH THE CHANGES IN THE MILITARY, COMMENTING ON THE LACK OF NOTICE GIVEN FOR THE CHANGES AND APPLAUDING MELGAR'S CHOICE AS COMMANDER OF THE ARMED FORCES. MELGAR'S ASCENSION, LA PRENSA SAYS, SHOULD PLEASE ALL

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HONDURANS (EXCEPT THOSE OF THE EXTREME LEFT) BECAUSE HE IS HONEST, SENSIBLE, AND HAS GOOD JUDGMENT.

5. THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES OF THE NATIONALIST AND LIBERAL PARTIES HAVE MET IN JOINT SESSION AND PLAN TO ISSUE SOON A PROCLAMATION CALLING FOR RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. THE PARTIES AGREE THAT THE CHANGES ARE A GOOD FIRST STEP AND THAT THE CURRENT SITUATION

PRESENTS THEIR FIRST REAL OPPORTUNITY SINCE THE 1972
LOPEZ COUP FOR THE PARTIES TO REGAIN A PORTION OF
THEIR LOST INFLUENCE.

6. THE COUNTRY'S POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE REMAINS CALM AND
MORE REASONED PUBLIC COMMENTARY CAN BE EXPECTED SHORTLY NOW
THAT ACCURATE INFORMATION IS BEING PROVIDED BY THE NEWS
MEDIA. MALDONADO'S QUOTED COMMENTS SERVE TO REINFORCE
THE EMBASSY'S VIEW THAT HE IS AN IMPORTANT INSIDER IN THE LT.
COLONELS' GROUP. THE EMBASSY ALSO BELIEVES THAT HIS COMMENTS
ABOUT BRINGING BENEFITS TO THE GREAT MAJORITY OF HONDURANS
REFLECT THE REPORTED INTEREST OF THE NEW POWER GROUP IN PUSHING
THE GOH'S PLANS FOR DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM, THE PACE
OF WHICH HAS BEEN A FACTOR IN MILITARY DISCONTENT.
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